



Friends' of Hilly Fields Chair's Annual Report September 2015

FRIENDS OF HILLY FIELDS CHAIR'S REPORT

September 2015

The Friends strive to promote amenity and wildlife in Hilly Fields, to encourage a wider use of the park by working with the local authority and Glendae. We also have representation with the wider Lewisham Friends' Forum and the London Friends' Green Network to preserve and enhance London's public green spaces.

REVIEW OF PAST YEARS ACTIVITIES

Hilly Fields Orchard: The orchard has continued to be a success. The fifth Wassail was held 15th February 2015, with musical contributions led by Charlie Hart and supported by Phil Hall. Wassail was provided by Helen Mercer. This year we attracted larger numbers than before (40 plus).

A pruning session took place before the Wassail, 18th November where volunteers weeded and re mulched the trees.

Tom Moulton has continued as orchard leader and co-ordinated the watering rota and organised the work sessions. The last four trees to be planted continue to require watering through summer and the mostly regular volunteers have filled the rota through spring and summer. Glendae have been providing the wood chip for mulching trees.

The additional fruit trees in the wider park, funded by London woodland and tree grant scheme saw the dog damaged tree replaced with a Merton Pear, courtesy of LOP. One of the mulberries ring barked at higher level due to bad staking was replaced by Glendae, as was an undamaged mulberry. The remaining snapped mulberry is now sprouting from the bottom.

FRUITING HEDGE: Volunteers have continued to do regular maintenance along with the orchard, with some weeding and pruning. The hedge has been very successful with few losses and is growing vigorously.

We have been offered black currants from Care Grow (farmers' market stall) and an orchard helper.



Orchard maintenance and watering sessions taking place throughout the year

BIODIVERSITY IMPROVEMENTS

Tom has attended the Lewisham Biodiversity Partnership meetings, which monitor nature/ biodiversity conservation across the borough. They have drawn up a 5 yr plan which will be circulated to Friends groups.

BOUNDARY HEDGING: We were successful in our application for hedge plants from the Woodland Trust and planted a mixed native hedge on 17th March to improve the boundary adjacent to the WWI meadow and Prendergasts. We donated half the hedge plants to the bowls club, so that they could reinforce their boundary with the Octavia Hill garden. Glendale prepared the ground for us and did some clearance, but unfortunately later this summer 25% was pulled up by Glendale when they completed the cutting back of self sown ash and sycamore. Glendale have offered us an additional 100 hedge plants including planting in lieu of their error.

We are continuing to build ecological improvements into the updated management plan and look to take these forward in the coming years.

MEADOWS: 2015 is the 20th anniversary of the planting of a wildflower meadow on the south slope. We have renamed it the South Meadow. Last year, a survey by botanists Nick Bertrand and Kate Cross found 42 flower species and 11 species of grass growing in the meadow. However, over the years, the grasses have grown tall and obscure and potentially shade out the flowers. Vigorous plants such as cow parsley are dominating some areas. On 20 June, Nature's gym weeded a small portion of the meadow. However, its sheer size requires longer term management. A strategy is being evolved with help from Glendale and Nature's Gym to divide the meadow into areas, tackle the problem one area at a time during winter/early spring and try to redress the balance between grasses and flowering plants. We are also considering planting Yellow Rattle which acts as a parasite on grass and helps to restrict its growth. This summer, 2015, Tom M and Pete Robinson have undertaken a park wide botanical survey.

This year's memorial meadow was less successful, Glendale agreed to prepare but when finally prepared the area was significantly smaller than the setting out and the on germination, there were no poppies and in place a yellow composite flower and daisy.

NATURE'S GYM: In addition to the weeding in the south meadow, they have carried out their regular work days in the park. They are mainly tasked with cutting back brambles, so that they can be kept at bay and clearing invasive thistles from the meadow.



Improving biodiversity, WWI meadow, South meadow and new hedge planting

Bird Champion: The scheme is now in its eight year. Monthly surveys are carried out by Tom Moulton and Sue Gore. The tally of bird species has increased over the year, with the last three species, a little owl, a spotted fly catcher and a song thrush. This brings the total of species to 47.

Big Bird Watch: This years 7th Big Bird Watch on Sunday, 27th January was the most well attended with around 100 people, some joining our bird experts for a tour of the park and others going alone. The lard came out for the fat balls and lots of children and a few adults got stuck in making the winter feeders. The final tally of birds seen or heard was 26 species which is the highest total recorded on Hilly Fields Big Birdwatch day since the event began in 2009. At the end of the morning we had our first registered song thrush.

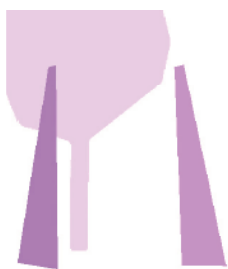
The Dawn Chorus Walk: It was an early start for the 20 plus people who turned up for the walk on 31st March, 2015. Tom arranged so that we could also visit the Brockley and Ladywell cemeteries. However, the 42 mph winds which had been blowing all night had still strong and this made it a little difficult at times to hear the bird song. By the end of the morning 21 species had been seen or heard.

Bats: On the 18th September we had our first Bat Walk on Hilly Fields, arranged by Andrew Harper and led by Nick Pond (Lewisham Greenscene). It attracted approximately 50 people and we managed to detect a few bats.

Lewisham Healthy Walks: are not directly linked to the Friends, but Tom leads a series in Hilly Fields. He has also led his very popular local nature walks from Cornmill Gardens to Hilly Fields, introducing many first timers to the park.

TREES OF HILLY FIELDS TALK: Rachel Mooney presented an extended version of the talk first presented at the Brockley Society Tree Conference. The information researched has proved useful for feeding into the tree strategy and will be invaluable source material for future park development and grant writing. We have continued to liaise and support Brockley Street Trees, especially with regards to sharing best practise.

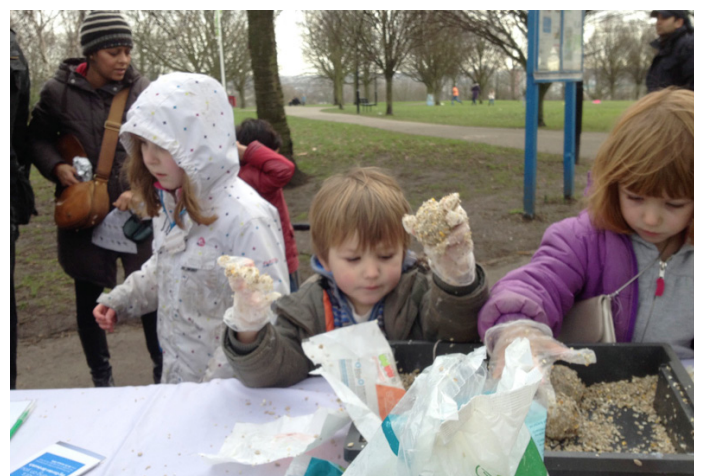
LEWISHAM PARKS FORUM and LONDON FRIENDS GREEN NETWORK: Symon Knightswood has been representing the friends at both groups, including attending the sub group looking into alternative models of park management.



Friends of Hilly Fields
www.hilly.org.uk
hillyfields4@googlemail.com

Bat Walk

in Hilly Fields



TREE STRATEGY: Time constraints have meant our planned meeting with the tree officer is still to be arranged, we will meet shortly and discuss our draft strategy as follows:

1. Preserve as much as possible the natural landscape of fields radiating outwards and downwards from a central ridge with wooded borders (including field borders) and copses.
2. Retain and plant new tree species which have high wildlife value whether native or varieties of native species. A range of different species should be planted to provide maximum variety of habitat for wildlife.
3. Three native trees associated with Hilly Fields in recent historical times are the hawthorn, the oak and the elm. All three have high wildlife value. Hawthorns and oaks still flourish. Consideration should be given to planting more elms now that 'disease-resistant' species are being developed.
4. Care should be taken to restrict the number of prolific self-seeding trees (eg. ash, cherry, horse chestnut).
5. Location of new trees will be agreed with the Friends of Hilly Fields but general principles will be:
 - (i) to plant in variety of locations including borders, lining pathways and in open space (but see iv below)
 - (ii) to emphasise open-form over close-form growth, but where planting in groups to allow enough space for each tree to realise its full leaf and flowering area.
 - (iii) to avoid blocking hill top views particularly to the south and east
 - (iv) to leave plenty of open space for recreation, exercise and grassland for flora and fauna
6. To care for trees once planted in accordance with agreed principles, (to be expanded). Including Our management proposal to leave a minimum of 1m unmown grass around the base of trees. Newly planted trees will have 1m of mulch around them.
7. Council and Friends will encourage an attitude of respect for trees amongst park users.
8. The timber and wood of storm-damaged trees should be left in situ as much as possible for the benefit of wildlife and outdoor education purposes.

We are regularly approached by members of the public wishing to plant memorial trees and have been able to co-ordinate so that the trees will tie in with the park's history and ultimately the tree strategy. Unfortunately, Glendale have over ridden this process, with a first marked tree. As usual once the error is made, it becomes impossible to rectify.



Trees of Hilly Fields Talk

Midsummer Fayre: Our stall on the main thorough fare attracted many people this year, with lots of interest in the ongoing plans and bird surveying. Over 40 people tried our quiz with three winners of the prizes kindly donated by Pistachios café. We had ordered a second batch of mugs which sold well along with our WWI memorial meadow post card.

Andrew Harper arranged a visit from Jenny Clark of the Sussex Bat Hospital and her own marquee away from the loud PA. This was generously funded by the Brockley Society.

The 'Then and Now' Mass Photo: organised by the Brockley Society, saw us with our second stall this summer. We were lent an impressive collection of historic photographs of the park, which attracted much interest. We discussed ideas for grants and there was positive feedback on the idea to rebuild the bandstand, with some discussion as to whether it would be better placed where Brockley Max place the stage or in its original position on top of hill. We also sold most of our remaining mugs, with the cafe taking the last few for sale from there.

Prendergast's Development: £10K of the section 106 money was used to repair the footpath immediately outside the school. The friends have a shortlist of mostly costed projects which they want the money to be spent on. We are awaiting quotes for the granite cross over. Final agreement needs to be made, but the current list includes:

A frame basket swing, sit up bench, balance rope and the granite sett cross over. The friends were keen to have oak or acacia, rather than the pressure treated hardwood. The decision will be confirmed for the end of the year.

The Farmers' Market

After the opening of the Brockley Market numbers dwindled at Hilly Fields with only two stalls remaining. The organisers decided to pull out of Hilly Fields, but the stalls wanted to continue. With agreement from Glendale, the Brockley Society and Friends will be supporting the market, putting up the advertising etc. They will then receive the money from the stalls, which the Friends intend to put towards small scale projects in the park. Initially repacing some of the missing worktops in the mud kitchen and expanding natural play activities in park.



The Friends of Hilly Fields' Mug and 'Then and Now', mass photo

Octavia Hill Garden: In line with our initial ideas to create a shade garden as a memorial to Octavia Hill and the Kyrle Society. Rachel has started to look into grants for improvement works. As the bowling club have had their building condemned, we have additionally looked into the idea of a combined building to use from the shade garden side as well as the bowls.

We are still interested in the Parks for People, from the HLF. This would have enabled a refurbishment of the whole park, including tennis courts, repair of the stone circle, new footpaths, park furniture etc. However, it is a full time job to get the application together and would require match funding and full commitment from the council.

A possibly more realistic alternative would be a smaller grant for the Octavia Hill Garden and bowls club.

Only minimal work has been carried out by the friends this year. A donation of bulbs from the MPGA in December meant some volunteer bulb planting was carried out with daffodils, erythronium and alliums planted in the garden.

We need more positive visitors to the garden and as it is the same volunteers for most activities, what we can achieve is limited. The option of developing a more natural space to encourage school groups and particularly forest school looks more viable. The Wild Play Day was very successful and used a forest school leader managed a fire pit in the area. Ideas of engaging with nature are in tune with the Octavia Hill's vision and also link in with local author, Henry Williamson's love of nature.

Eurilla Forest School trial a few sessions in the gardens and had a positive response. We are following up the forest school ideas, and hope to discuss how we can improve the space. Whilst, still retaining the carpets of spring bulbs and have a level of horticultural excellence for viewing.



Planting spring bulbs and returning to admire them

Ongoing Park Management Plan: the original development plan has been revised, as many of the goals were achieved and we have further developed some of the thoughts for use of the shade garden and to improve biodiversity.

Some elements are not consulted, so the introduction of new lighting saw lights positioned under canopies and now recent excavation around mature planes on Hilly Fields Crescent has taken place and electric boxes positioned on grass in the park, for the new street lights on footpath (not in park). Many of the surplus poles have been removed by Glendale, but the overall impression no entrances is cluttered. We have asked Skanska if we can paint directional signs on the posts, but they have not answered. Gemma at Glendale has offered to follow up.

General problems with motorbikes, quad bikes, cars and a metal detector have seen low level damage and the bikes are particularly dangerous to all park users. Some incidents are reported to the police as they should be and given a crime number. If it just remains as complaints between users, the police have no statistics and the problem will be overlooked. Glendale have agreed to replace the broken and missing bollard at top of the lane to prevent a regular car accessing the WWI meadow area. They are also repairing the vehicular barrier to the top of the lane to enable the ice cream van to park on the tarmac and not obstruct the path.

Glendale have also been in touch with the football clubs to ask their users not to bring cars onto the grass, this has had little effect.

We have been in touch with the officers at Ladywell Safer Neighbourhood, but they have not responded to our emails.

Park Keeper: We have seen further cuts to the Park Keeper's rota. We now have no morning cover or any cover on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. This has lead to a noticeable increase in litter and a huge problem with full bins being raided by crows and foxes, resulting in a litter strewn park in the early morning. The cafe have been clearing up debris around the cafe on a regular basis. Following our complaints, Glendale said that their mobile team would regularly visit first thing. However, there are incidences of the bins left full at the end of the day including the euro bin left for volunteer's collections. The situation has become so bad, that Chris Wheal has begun a litter removal group, but the volume of rubbish on a sunny evening is phenomenal.

We have spent some remaining funds held by Glendale on four new fox proof bins.



Litter crisis

Francis Drake Bowls Club

We have continued to liaise with the bowls club and hope to progress a project to combine a new club house with the shade garden.

Update from Stephen at Parkrun.

"Hilly Fields Parkrun has continued to grow in the last year and now averages 150 runners running 5k at 9am every Saturday morning. An increasing number of our runners have also become members of the local running club, Kent ac, as a result of running regularly and mean that there is a good Brockley presence at most local races. The run gets great feedback about the community feel it has and has fostered many friendships.

Unfortunately on New Year's Day a runner suffered a cardiac arrest shortly after finishing. Thankfully 4 regular runners were able to administer CPR to him for the 10-15 minutes until the ambulance service arrived, and after surgery at Kings he has made an almost full recovery. As a reaction to this event runners raised funds and have arranged for the provision of a public AED which is kept in the cafe - hopefully it will never be needed but it's good to know it's there.

Further fundraising and enthusiasm by runners has also resulted in the start of a junior parkrun - a 2k run for 4-14 year olds which takes place at 9:30 every Sunday and itself has a growing loyal following.

They held their third birthday run on Saturday 12th September and look forward to continuing organic growth of the Hilly Fields parkrun community."

Along with long-standing activities such as the Saturday morning football, there are many more sporting activities using the park, including pilates and boot camp. These are arranged by Glendale and we are no the wiser what is happening than any other park user.

Green Flag: Green flag visited on a very windy 6th May. At short notice the friends were invited to meet the judges either before or after the their tour, but as they were running ahead of themselves, we arrived in time for the tour and were more usefully able to show them around the park. We were awarded the Green Flag.

Website: We continue posting events on the website, we had a recent spate of spam emails, but Chris Wheal has updated our guards.

We have 100 on our email contact list, but it needs reviewing so that people can remove themselves and we can manage new contacts. We have 711 friends on facebook and growing.

THANKS to everyone who has been involved throughout the year, especially our loyal volunteers.



Parkrun